



Soundboard

The newsletter of the Nottingham & District Society of Organists

Est. 1932

January 2020

FROM THE PRESIDENT



I wonder how often each of us is moved physically to tears by a particular musical performance? I suspect it's actually quite rare; though one such instance from my past came to mind very recently, for a sad reason. The year was 1970, the occasion was a recital in St Mary's, Nottingham by the choir of St John's College, Cambridge, accompanied by the undergraduate organ scholar, Stephen Cleobury. Among the items on the programme was "The Spirit of the Lord" (prologue to "The Apostles") by Elgar. Readers who remember the incredibly versatile 8 stop Grant, Degens and Bradbeer instrument from those days will understand why (only for that one item) it was eschewed in favour of the grand piano, and the combination of the boys' voices and Stephen's immaculate piano accompaniment was, for me at any rate, overwhelming in the intensity of its emotional impact. (Years later, in recalling the occasion conversationally in his characteristically precise "clipped" voice, but with a twinkle in his eye, the only 16' stop - which happened to be a short-resonator reed - on the G. D. & B. was referred to as a "sardine"!)

There can be few organists whose musical journey didn't start on the piano, but there are still piano teachers who actively discourage their pupils from taking up the organ on the grounds that it will spoil their technique (maybe it's imagined that organists spend all their time playing "Jerusalem" on mechanically coupled manuals) but I don't think this is actually so, though it **does** remain true that a firmly grounded piano technique is vital for success on the organ. This all assumes that young people have actually heard an organ played well enough to want to learn in the first place, and I would suggest to colleagues that playing for services at which youngsters are present - maybe Church schools where children are taken to church at least once a term in school time - is quite a responsibility. Head teachers and clergy usually recognise that uninspired (or worse - patronising) leadership from the pulpit can put children off church for life, as - I'm sure - can second-rate and careless playing and unsympathetic accompanying.

I was lucky enough to attend a school with a Hall big enough to accommodate everybody for daily assembly, with a hymn, and later to spend many years as Director of Music in a school with a similar tradition. Yehudi Menuhin's fervent belief that every school day should begin with singing and dancing for all children is well documented. The reality in 21st century schools is rather different, though outstanding examples of good practice in music education are, thankfully, not too thin on the ground. However, I did raise an eyebrow recently on encountering a Year 11 GCSE music student who hadn't the remotest idea what a bassoon looked or sounded like, and we all know what happens when a classical music subject is among the options in a "Pointless" round!

My best wishes to all for 2020.

Roger Harrison

Editor's note: I have been invited to clarify the 'sardine' – actually the clever little 16' pedal reed stop, whose official name was/is 'Sordun', even the longest resonator a mere 2' long.

NEXT MEETING

Saturday 18th January, 15.00

A talk by Jonathan Rennert, Organist of St Michael's, Cornhill, on the life and work of George Thalben-Ball.
Venue: Halam Court. *Details overleaf.*



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Please put them in your diary now!

Saturday 18 January, 15.00

A talk by Jonathan Rennert, Organist of St Michael's, Cornhill, on the life and work of George Thalben-Ball, the anniversary of whose death in 1987 falls on this very day.

Venue: Halam Court. Please feel free to bring a friend.

Saturday 8 February, 12.30 for 13.00

Annual luncheon to be held at the Corinthian Restaurant, Masonic Hall, Goldsmith Street.

Parking is possible in the Masonic car park, two-thirds of the way down Chaucer Street on the right (signage: Belgrave Rooms). At the barrier, press the intercom buzzer and announce yourself.

Wednesday 18 March

Outing to Malvern, to visit the Priory and Nicholson's organ works. It is also hoped to incorporate a visit to the restored organ at the church of St Mary Magdalene, Twynning, the oldest surviving instrument by John Nicholson. Transport by minibus or small coach.

April (precise date yet to be confirmed)

A White Peak afternoon, visiting various delightful Derbyshire village churches and their organs, including Tissington and Norbury. Members' cars.



Saturday 16 May

President's Afternoon. Commencing 14.30 at Halam Court. Members and friends are equally welcome to this annual social event, on this occasion to be accompanied by performances by the renowned Derbyshire recorder group, Stanton Waits.

For all the above, it would be wise to check near the time for any possible change of detail.

FORTHCOMING RECITALS

The recital season will soon be upon us once more, with traditional venues very much to the fore...

- St Mary's, Melton Mowbray. Fortnightly on Tuesdays at 13.00: 28 January – Ivan Linford
- St Modwen's, Burton-upon-Trent. Weekly on Wednesdays at 12.30: 11 March – David Butterworth
- Chesterfield Parish Church. Weekly on Thursdays at 12.15: 7 May – Eric Singleton
- St Laurence's, Retford. Monthly on Thursdays at 13.00: 21 May – Paul Hale

RECENT EVENTS

Day trip to St Albans – 17 September

Many years ago Elizabeth and I lived in Hemel Hempstead; for two years that put me just a few miles from Evensong at St Albans on Saturday afternoons. I have happy memories of these services (at least 30 of them) sitting mostly in the crossing but occasionally in the organ loft. These were the days of Peter Hurford and Simon Lindley and huge Saturday congregations especially in the summer when many of the visitors to the town would come in for the service. Alas, on Tuesday September 17th only four of our members were there – a pity because it was an excellent day. Could not more members ask for lifts? I took a car with just me in it; I would gladly have shared it with two or three other people.

The International Organ Festival Society organ is a most interesting instrument, subscribed to by many far and wide, including our own Society. Built by Peter Collins in the style of Andreas Silberman, it has a straight pedal board which means some British organists might have a bit of adjusting to do but must make players from continental Europe feel at home. The organ brings to life the eighteenth century repertoire which can be difficult to interpret musically on so many English organs. The touch is light and responsive. A glance inside the back of the case revealed much excellent craftsmanship, though it was noticed that the pedal reed pipes were beginning to collapse through lack of support. Why, oh why, do British builders to this day insist on tying up their reed pipes with bits of tape instead of supporting them with proper collars as the continentals do? The (still quite new) Mander organ in St Peter's Parish Church is a very different instrument but equally fine. With a modern eclectic "English" approach, it develops plenty of power from its 39 stops on three manuals. Quality is apparent throughout the instrument. The mechanical action has a super "feel", in engineering as well as musical terms. It was interesting to hear that when the appeal fund closed and the organ was complete there was cash left over to purchase a (rather super) grand piano... A glance in the estate agents' windows in the high street provides some clue to this!

The end of the visit found us in the Abbey for Evensong, sung on this occasion by the boys' choir. Considering the boys come in from the town from a variety of local schools, as they do at some other smaller cathedrals these days, they put up a good show. The psalm and both canticles were all to plainsong, conducted, however, in a very stilted note-for-note manner which robbed the singers of any musical initiative in so far as that is appropriate in plainsong. The choice of anthem was also rather odd, a simple hymn-tune affair which was eminently forgettable. Throughout, however, it is worthy of mention that the attitude of the boys, in terms of both attentiveness and behaviour, was excellent. The concluding voluntary was sumptuous, a beautiful rendition of a Bach Chorale Prelude. Having already enjoyed a surfeit of 'cornets' at both St Saviour's and St Peter's, here was yet another beautiful example on the Harrison/Downes cathedral organ, accompanied by equally lovely 8' and 4' flutes. Notwithstanding any reservations above, this was a thoroughly worthy and fitting service, a perfect end to a most enjoyable day. Many thanks to our President, Roger, for organizing it.

Richard Eaton

We are sorry to record the deaths of our long-standing members, Neville Crown and Charles McNicol, and of the gifted small-time Derbyshire builder Ed Stow, who did much sterling work for churches on a limited budget, and who had only recently retired. The premature death of Sir Stephen Cleobury has also come as a great shock to many of us. His life and times have been written up extensively, and there is a charming reference to him in our President's message.

Denmark revisited – 26 October

The nine-day visit to Denmark in March 2016 must have been one of the most ambitious undertakings in the Society's history. 3½ years after the event, a dozen or so members (including "survivors" of the trip and even two veterans of St Mary's Choir trip of 1970) assembled for a couple of hours in the Music Room at Halam Court for a most impressive retrospective on the entire enterprise, presented –

with over 100 beautifully presented visual and aural aids - by the man who planned and delivered it all.



Glimpses of the map of Denmark, the extensive itinerary and the photos, reminded us of the most significant aspect of its geography; the 70+ inhabited islands to the west of the Jutland peninsula (which actually contains less than half the total population), so that transport relies significantly on bridges and ferries. Danes have long appreciated the link between a high level of public spending, quality of life and social stability (not to mention tolerance and social liberalism) of which there was clear architectural and environmental evidence in the slides. The Evangelical Lutheran Church enjoys a measure of material support from the state unknown in the UK, so churches are, by and large, well-staffed, immaculately maintained and tastefully furnished - not least with superb organs, adhering for the most part to the principles of *orgelbewegung*.

One can only attempt in a review such as this to record personal impressions and highlights of an evening densely packed with so much of interest. One such reflection concerned the apparent health of amateur and professional music-making in a country whose heritage may be described as relatively slight in comparison to, say, Germany, Italy, France and England (only Buxtehude and Nielsen come readily to mind when thinking of Danish composers) but the disciplined and immaculate presentation of the Choir of Trinity Church, Esbjerg, and the enthusiastic participation of children, was an inspiration, as was the care they must have taken over the English pronunciation in C.S. Lang's "Te Deum."

Esbjerg, specifically Trinity Church, was both the start and the finish of the tour, framing several hundred miles on the road, crossing and re-crossing the country and visiting, *inter alia*, churches, a conservatoire, a museum, a castle and (of course) Marcussen & Søn, Orgelbyggeri of Aabenraa. There can be few manufacturing premises anywhere where such skill, workmanship and loving devotion to the craft is so evident; watching the process of casting the alloy in the metal pipe shop on video was fascinating. (The premises have changed only a little since 1970, when the Nottingham instruments existed only as drawings.)

More on Treenighedskirke, Esbjerg, where there is evidently so much to see and marvel at: the extraordinary triangular organ loft and free-standing bell tower being just two examples. For further information, do have a look at its impressive website (though it's misguidedly chosen not to feature Duruflé's *Fugue sur nom d'Alain*, DSB's performance of which comprised one of the videos and audio extracts in the presentation).

Lest one might assume, after all this, that all Danish organs are post 1925 and by Marcussen or Frobenius, the 1610 Compenius organ at Frederiksborg Castle will have you thinking again! The oldest organ in Denmark has over 1000 pipes, all made of wood, and producing sounds of great beauty, contemporary temperament notwithstanding. As befits a royal residence, the materials and craftsmanship are of the highest quality. And, for that matter, in the midst of all this organic purity (!) there is even an 1890 Cavaillé-Coll, from where a recent CD, "Widor at Valby", was recorded.

Yes; the buildings, particularly the green copper-roofed churches, and of course the organs made their mark; the images of storks nesting on a Ribe rooftop and the seemingly pointless bus stop on an expanse of beach contributed to our appreciation of the atmosphere of this country, offering our world so much more than Lurpak butter, pastries and bacon.

David Butterworth's close links with Denmark, in particular his friendship with the present generation of the Marcussen/Zachariassen family, informed much of what we all learned in the course of the evening and makes him uniquely qualified to have devised such a successful tour back in 2016. We are most grateful.

Roger Harrison

St Oswald's, Ashbourne – 17 November

Notwithstanding a dark and damp Sunday evening, an excellent crowd of supporters – including eight members of the Society – filled the large chancel of the magnificent St Oswald's Church in Ashbourne, for a presentation by our President, Roger Harrison, and his older son, Matt, who is a full-time professional trombonist and ABRSM examiner.

Roger first provided us with a general introduction to the event, and then played Frank Bridge's *Adagio* most convincingly on the church's large Romantic organ by Hill / Hill, Norman & Beard x 3 / Groves.

Michael Halls, the church's long-time Organist and Choirmaster, gave an account of the organ's history, with special reference to Groves' work, this basically involving making the instrument more 'nave friendly' with the addition of a small nave chorus of 8'4"2" along with additional nave-facing Swell shutters. (One of this organ's fascinations for me is the array of fancily stencilled and variously coloured pipes filling the chancel arch, clearly an assortment from at least two if not more different ranks featuring different mouth shapes and sizes.)



Then it was Matt's turn to present the rest of the musical programme, along with a potted *raison* of the scarcity of repertoire for solo trombone. He demonstrated the different characteristics of the two instruments he had brought with him – an alto and a 'standard' tenor. In the right hands (i.e. Matt's) it was impressive just how lyrically both these instruments could be handled in a short programme of works, being *Alma ingrate* by Emperor Joseph I; *Sonata in F* by Alessandro Marcello; chorale preludes by J.S. Bach – *Aus tiefer Noth* - the trombone taking the right foot (!) part and *Wachet auf* with the trombone taking the left hand chorale; and Alexandre Guilmant's *Morceau Symphonique*, along with that old chestnut *Panis Angelicus* – an all-time favourite in the Editor's Desert Island slush box. We were informed that Guilmant wrote around 98 works all told, 88 of which were for solo organ. The *Morceau Symphonique* is therefore something of an exception to his routine *modus operandi*. In fact, it is really scored for trombone and piano, but it goes so well with organ that this is how it is normally heard. I must say it was an immediately engaging work of genuine substance, and a fantastic finale to a lovely programme.

Following this presentation, we were regaled with tea and delicious cakes in the church hall, Judy Harrison being a major and much appreciated player in this part of the proceedings. Finally, two of us from the Society returned to the church for Evensong, I suppose best described on this occasion as semi-Choral. It is remarkable in this day and age to see a choir turn out in such numbers on a winter's evening, virtually to fill the stalls – and that as a matter of course, for I have been there before. There was an introit, *Thou knowest, Lord* – H. Purcell, and an anthem, albeit a rather inconsequential little affair,

As water to the thirsty by John Barnard. There was also a nicely sung psalm and four very well-chosen hymns. Our President, of course, accompanied the whole proceedings with a competence and suavity all his own!

This was a truly excellent event, and grateful thanks and congratulations must go to Roger and Judy Harrison, to Matt, to the church's Organist Michael Halls, the many members of the choir, and all those others involved behind the scenes.

David Butterworth

Visit to Oakham – 4 December

An afternoon in Oakham proved to be an appealing way of spending an early December afternoon, so there was a pleasing attendance for this meeting. We started at 1:30 by hearing a 20-minute piano recital by the extremely talented Rupert Fell, a member of Oakham School's Lower 6th, given as part of a series by Oakham pupils in All Saints' Church. We then were given the opportunity of playing – and hearing others play – the Tickell organ in All Saints', and the Collins organ in the school chapel, both instruments dating from the mid 1990s, and quite distinct from each other, despite exemplifying the same trends in late 20th century organ tonal design and construction.

After the organs, we converged at the home of Fr Stephen Dye, Parish Priest of St Joseph's R.C. Church and N.D.S.O. Chaplain, where we enjoyed a delicious tea and a fascinating time amongst Fr Stephen's amazing collection of keyboard instruments, records (shellac and vinyl), piano rolls, CDs, books, periodicals and much else. We heard at least four "self-propelled" player pianos, as well as the "handbag" extract from "The Importance of Being Ernest" on an acoustic gramophone with a large horn, just as depicted on the famous HMV logo but much bigger!

We are indebted to Kevin Slingsby and All Saints' Church, and to Peter Davis and Oakham School for access to the organs. Peter gave up a considerable chunk of his afternoon to demonstrate the Chapel organ and answer our questions on all aspects of music at Oakham, which is clearly in excellent hands. Lucky students! And thank you, Stephen, for inviting us to your home to enjoy your unique brand of hospitality. We had no idea what you had in store for us!

Roger Harrison

ORGAN BUILDERS' NEWS

The total number of staff employed by our country's organ builders continues to diminish perceptibly, but there seems to be a lot of work out there for most firms. Bread-and-butter "C&Os" keep many a firm afloat during darker moments. Harrison & Harrison are steadily bringing to fruition no less than four cathedral contracts noted in our previous issue. Amongst forthcoming work in their pipeline is an interesting new instrument for Christ Church, Alexandria VA, U.S.A. Of 21 stops, this looks as though it could be - or ought to be - on mechanical action (like their Bedford organ). Much repair work can be seen, more often than not electrical, including the large Compton in St Bride's, Fleet Street, which was recently struck by lightning (I wonder where that came from?) The church is of particular interest to the Editor as having been totally rebuilt after war destruction by Norman & Burt of Burgess Hill; Francis Norman built for his family your Editor's former home, in 1899. Nicholsons have a huge amount of updating and repair work in hand, again much of it electrical (tracker critics please note). The big surprise, however, is a major operation, both mechanical and tonal, on the Harrison organ of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. We await a visit to Nicholson's works on 18th March with the greatest interest. John Mander has retired from his own firm, leaving behind, however, a first-rate staff with long experience at Bethnal Green. Two major rebuilds completed in 2019 are of the Walker organ in Waltham Abbey, and of the Father Willis / Bishop organ in King's College Chapel, London.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

John Morehen

Whenever I meet somebody for the first time I am often asked about my ‘day job’. I usually reply simply that I am ‘a musician’ or ‘a teacher’. This almost invariably prompts a ‘supplementary’ question, “Oh really, what do you play [or teach]?” I then have to explain that being a musician often involves so much more than merely playing or teaching an instrument, and is, in effect, a ‘portfolio career’ – a bit of this, a touch of that, and a smattering of just about everything else. Indeed, I often reflect on how fortunate we are as musicians to earn our livelihood through a range of activities which can be both immensely varied and artistically satisfying.

Although born in the shadows of Gloucester Cathedral I was never a cathedral chorister. I did sing from an early age in two local church choirs, however, and I studied organ with the cathedral organist, Dr Herbert Sumsion, who was a close friend of Elgar. My early education was master-minded by Gloucester City Education Committee, who plucked me out of my local grammar school and transplanted me into boarding school at Clifton College (Bristol), which had an outstanding reputation for Music. There I was a piano student of the legendary one-armed Director of Music, Dr Douglas Fox. I also studied organ, French horn and clarinet. I suppose the highlights of my teenage years were appearing as soloist in piano concertos by Beethoven and Rachmaninov, and in Franck’s *Symphonic Variations*.

On leaving Clifton in 1960 I was offered a scholarship to the Royal School of Church Music, which was then located in glorious parkland at Addington Palace in Surrey, the 19th-century country residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury. Here, under the supervision of its Director Dr Gerald Knight, I gained valuable experience as a church musician, honing my organ-playing and choir-training skills, learning the intricacies of plainsong, and forging useful contacts in the world of the organ loft. The following year I was fortunate to be awarded the first Organ Scholarship at New College, Oxford. Working daily with a professional choir was an invaluable experience, and stood me in good stead when I later came to train choirs for conductors such as Yehudi Menuhin, Sir David Willcocks, and Sir Charles Mackerras. When I graduated from Oxford my tutor Dr (now Sir) David Lumsden suggested that my professional career would probably follow a very different trajectory from that which I then planned. At heart I did not believe him, but how correct he proved to be. If anyone had told me then, for instance, that I would spend twenty years of my life writing computer software for determining the likely composers of anonymous 16th-century Latin motets I would probably have suggested that one of us should go to a darkened room and start taking the tablets! I returned to New College in Hilary Term 1966 to run the choir during Sir David’s absence on study leave. When he had originally invited me to deputize for him he had ‘forgotten’ to tell me that the College’s fairly unpleasant organ would be removed during the preceding vacation to make way for the ground-breaking 1969 Grant, Degens and Bradbeer instrument, which was destined to command respect and notoriety in equal measure! For a whole term the Chapel services were either unaccompanied or accompanied on a grand piano.

I spent 1964-7 at King’s College, Cambridge, researching for a Ph.D in Elizabethan church music, during which time I also played tenor viol in a viol consort with Professor Thurston Dart, Professor John Stevens and others. It was at Cambridge that I first met the Editor of *Soundboard*, as I distantly recall playing in a viol consort for him on 4 May 1966 for the regular Wednesday afternoon broadcast of Choral Evensong on what was then the ‘Home Service’.

At the end of my time in Cambridge I was shortlisted for the post of Sub-Organist at Westminster Abbey. There were only two of us in the final selection process, and I came second! Fortunately, I had a ‘plan B’ in the form of an offer of two linked positions in Washington DC – one a teaching position at the College of Church Musicians (administered by Washington National Episcopal Cathedral) and a Lecturership at American University. I had already spent an enthralling semester in Washington during the previous year, and I jumped at the opportunity to return. It was a decision which was to lead to one of the happiest periods in my life, and marked the start of a lifelong association with a vibrant and exhilarating city which I have always regarded as my second home. As Washington music

critic for *The Musical Times* I had complimentary tickets for concerts at Washington's Constitution Hall. On one occasion I invited one of my organ students ('Marie', a former student at New England Conservatory of Music, in Boston) to be my guest at a concert by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Erich Leinsdorf. Fifty years later Marie still accompanies me to concerts; we celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary in July 2019!

My many memories of this great city include attending two performances of Mahler's great 8th Symphony on consecutive nights at Washington Cathedral, and being at Arlington National Cemetery on 29 March 1966 when the Indian Prime Minister Indira Ghandi laid a wreath at the tomb of President John Kennedy. I also witnessed the funeral procession of President Kennedy's brother Senator Robert Kennedy a few months later. But perhaps my most memorable experience of all was sitting in the congregation in Washington Cathedral on Sunday 31 March 1968 when Dr Martin Luther King preached at Matins. Four days later, on 4 April 1968, he died in a Memphis motel at the hands of an assassin's bullet. I could barely believe it when, the next day, I stood in the same Cathedral for Dr King's Memorial Service as President Lyndon Johnson, closely protected by his Secret Service detail, was quickly whisked past me to his seat in the Cathedral.

On my desk at Washington Cathedral one morning in April 1969 was a telegram from Dr Sidney Campbell offering me the post of Sub-Organist at St George's Chapel, Windsor. It was an invitation I could not refuse.

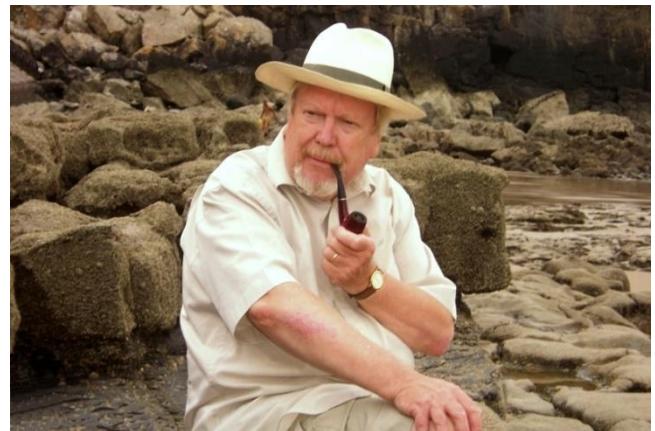
I took up the post two days after the Funeral of HRH Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent and five days before another Royal Funeral – that of Miss Katherine Peebles ('Mispy'), former Governess to The Prince of Wales and The Princess Royal.

A perquisite of my Windsor appointment was a grace-and-favour penthouse apartment in Windsor Castle, with spectacular views over the River Thames towards Eton College. My duties involved playing the organ or directing the choir for the Chapel services when required, especially at major

Festivals such as Christmas and Easter, which the Royal Family always attended *en masse*. One Easter the Court Circular listed 22 members of the Royal Family as having attended Easter Matins. Among many memorable events were the spectacular annual Services of the Order of the Garter. At the other end of the emotional spectrum the funerals of distinguished military leaders such as Earl Alexander of Tunis and Viscount Slim left an indelible impression. The organ in St George's Chapel had been restored in 1966 by Harrison's, and the Dean and Chapter were most cooperative in allowing me to use it for seven or eight recordings for BBC Radio 3.

By now, I was spending much of my time editing Renaissance music, and I concluded that my future probably lay outside church music. In 1973 I was appointed to a Lectureship in Music at Nottingham University. Thus began a very happy thirty-year association with the University, culminating in appointment as Professor of Music (1989) and, finally, as the inaugural Head of the School of Humanities (1998-2001). Establishing from scratch a coherent and unified academic School embracing such disparate disciplines as Archaeology, Classics, Music, Philosophy and Theology was an exciting challenge. In the process I learned the foibles of Archaeologists, Classicists, Philosophers and Theologians, eventually concluding that Musicians were perhaps not quite as eccentric as I had hitherto imagined.

In 2002 I took early retirement from my University post, a process which Marie (wearing her Personnel Director's hat) describes as 'the ultimate promotion'. Since then my intensive involvement with the activities of the Worshipful Company of Musicians has led to a new life within the City of London, and in 2012/13 I was privileged to be elected Master. Now, seventeen years into retirement, I remain active as editor, adjudicator, critic, journalist and keyboard player (just about), and I have even had the audacity to dabble in composition. Being a musician is indeed a 'portfolio career'.





David's Diary

Tradition rules! Well, yes and no. We recently considered how reliant we are on the old techniques which go into the art of the organ.

Casting the metal for organ pipes and then actually making them, for example, are delightfully unchanged. Mechanical key actions and slider soundboards, and – if you can afford it – a nice case to please the eye, have been with us from the year dot; they remain with us to this day as a *sine qua non* of many an organ builder and organist.

But make no mistake, things do change, in some ways uncontroversially; in others one may opine ‘for better or worse’, depending on your point of view. We are all more or less aware of the highways and by-ways that have made up a fascinating story of progress not entirely dissimilar to, shall we say, the history of transport. Not that I am suggesting for one moment that we might try to land an organ on the moon. But, from some of the latest developments, I am tempted to suggest that we have come a little closer than we could have dreamed of only twenty years ago.

Let’s start with the pipes. Not much change there. If anything, ancient techniques in metal pipemaking have been rediscovered, what with casting on sand, hammering the metal, et al. Mind you, even in this department, Laukhuff’s computerised laser-cutting machine will now produce a complete set of bodies and feet ‘in the flat’, ready for the customer to take home and just roll up and solder! Then, wooden pipemaking obviously benefits hugely from machinery unknown to Mark Wicks (see the last issue), which will size all the parts to infinite accuracy before one reaches for the glue-pot (hmm ... or the handy white-glue-in-a-tube-with-resealable-nozzle.) And soundboards ‘benefit’ from the stability of plywood, i.e. if you don’t mind drilling every one of those hundreds of holes from both sides, and MDF – as long as you’re quite sure it will never get damp! Even the dreaded chipboard has been tried with the same caveats, with the added disadvantages of prematurely blunting one’s tools and of weight (ref. Blackburn cathedral and even the Pedal chest of my GDB.) On the

contrary, though, just watch Edward Bennett putting the finishing touches to a new soundboard up at Goetze & Gwynn, made entirely of prime thoroughly-seasoned oak, and one might wonder why anyone would have it otherwise ...

So, as we can see, it’s very much a matter of ‘push and pull.’ Every step ‘forward’ seems to have its flip side, and then all that is complicated by taste and principles and so on. But it is probably in the matter of control that the most significant changes have been made in the first two decades of this century. The subject alone has spawned many an excellent book, and this is no place for anything more than a fleeting glance. Loosely speaking, I suppose it all started with the industrial revolution, coinciding with the rise in Romanticism in music and the arts. Inevitably, bigger became better, and in many instances, money became available to prop up personal and civic ambitions. Mistakes were made ... The (then) massive organ in York Minster, built by Elliott and Hill in 1834, was doomed to failure from the start, requiring the strength of a horse to press down the keys. Hill’s monumental Birmingham Town Hall organ of the same year must have been heavy going at first, for only 15 years later we see it re-equipped with some Barker Lever action – the very first manifestation of pneumatics, and still rather fun to play to this day with its attendant ‘clickety-clack’ noises! But it was a little later on, in 1872, that the brilliant ‘Father’ Willis broke new ground by dividing the Wren organ case of St Paul’s Cathedral into two halves, north and south, where they remain to this day. Great and Choir were on tracker action, but the famous 12-stop Swell and some of the Pedal, were on the far side of the chancel, connected by a simple single-action pneumatic design, the tubes running under the floor. I can’t readily believe the Swell wasn’t just a little slower than the tracker divisions, but the whole organ seems to have courted great favour, at least for a while. More or less from then on, pneumatic actions were developed along all sorts of different paths, the end targets being the same – lightness of touch, promptness, and ideally longevity. Mainstream builders had plenty of opportunity to develop their own paths to what they considered perfection. Binns (ref. Albert Hall and Castle Gate, Nottingham) famously

'patented' his three-stage pressure system, actually very little different to some others!; Harrisons at, for example, Jesus College Cambridge, preferred an exhaust system which never went wrong, had excellent attack, but a chronic release with all the spontaneity of a dozy hippo. Hill, Norman & Beard got it just about right with an exhaust system with fantastic response, on and off, an example with which I have just been involved in the restoration of their 1933 instrument at Hadfield R.C. church. Here is an action so superb that, on first playing, I was led to assume that we had an electro-pneumatic action, and a very good one at that. So good that, after careful consideration, the builder, David Wood, and I concurred that the best thing to do with all the relevant tackle behind the console was to leave it alone – after eighty-five years! Locally, we have seen some interesting examples in the field. On the one hand, we had Taylors of Leicester with their own patented designs featuring the little rows of miniature duplicate 'setter' knobs above the Swell keys – highly regarded but a bit of a job to restore. Even more locally, Carlton Hill to be precise, Mr. Wragg was turning out probably the slowest of all pneumatics ever known to mankind, but with an honest face and at a knockdown price which suited some hard-pressed customers. Pneumatics sometimes went further than necessary, though. Keates's modest two-manual at the URC in Sutton-in-Ashfield is perfectly laid out (vertically) for a tracker action, but nevertheless was built with pneumatics. T'other way around, the best pneumatic 'masters' never lost their tracker touch. The little Sir Sidney Nicholson Harrison now in Ilkeston R.C. church is superb to play (albeit tonally destroyed by some monkeying about some years ago). I would also cite wonderful Binns tracker actions at St Michael's, Radford (now long lost) and at Farnsfield P.C. A dip into the current issue of the annual 'Organ Building' will reveal an excellent article on pneumatic actions by John Norman, which covers the subject from end to end from a very practical perspective.

Then, of course, we inevitably come to electrics, and here I'm afraid I really must wield the editorial big stick, for it's another big subject of its own. Many of us, if pushed, would probably cite the eccentric and genuinely gifted Robert

Hope-Jones as the begetter of all things electric; we may even recall the famous picture of him playing his organ in gown and mortar board, seated atop the console in the churchyard of St John's, Birkenhead in 1899. But that wasn't the start. The credit there probably goes to Henry Bryceson & Sons (probably more accurately the sons). I knew the name right back in boyhood days from family holidays in Devon, where the name kept cropping up (yes, I was already an organ nut), e.g. at Dartmouth, Stoke Fleming, Slapton and others, all wonderfully traditional and forthright. It is hard to believe that the similarly impressive Bryceson we recently visited at Hickling issued from the same firm that installed Britain's very first electric action in Drury Lane Theatre in 1862, thirteen years before Willis's venturesome pneumatics in St Paul's! Bryceson were also quick to take up the rights of Charles Spackman Barker's researches in France, and this led to the equally intriguing achievement of a three (later five) -manual instrument for Rugby School Chapel on electro-pneumatic action as early as 1872.



S:t Petri kyrka, Malmö

Fast forward to the twenty-first century, and we have electronics. I don't mean electronic/digital organs; we are still talking pipe organs. I have already touched on the two faces of Bryceson – I suspect represented by the father on the one hand (he died in 1860), and his two sons, Henry and John on the other. I think the sons were the 'whacky' ones. And there was Hope-Jones. Do we still have horizon-stretchers? Oh, yes! On these shores, where money for organs is as tight as it is anywhere, we gain occasional glimpses. I well recall a N.D.S.O. members' recital a long while back in St Barnabas Cathedral. As his own contribution, our host Peter Smedley opted for a performance of Scott Joplin's Maple Leaf Rag.

Good idea; so off he went, so we thought. After a few lines, Peter calmly walked out into the centre of the building while the organ continued to play. He had recorded it earlier on his newly installed Christie transmission system. It was a very entertaining moment! From then, it wasn't such a big step to dispensing altogether with that annoying multiplex cable that used to (and still does) trail behind many a moveable console. The connection between player and pipes can now be effected entirely in the ether, with no visible connection. Not without its hitches, mind you; for example, first attempts to achieve this at Notre-Dame Paris were disastrous, consequently with much blood spilt! On our own shores, Clevedon organs – so far as I can tell a rebirth of the former Percy Daniel & Co. of Clevedon – know a thing or two about the future. Their restoration of the already somewhat modernistic glass-cased GDB in the Friends' Meeting House, Sussex University, sports a console that might not look out of place in a moonscape. You might love it or hate it, but it is clearly well done.

On the Continent, it seems that practically anything goes, money notwithstanding. At the main church in Malmö, S:t Petri kyrka, there is a fine five-manual Marcussen. St Mary's Choir sang there in the 1970s in conjunction with the organ which the late Jürgen Zachariassen (head of the firm) told me was his favourite organ. With a seemingly bottomless purse, the main organ has now been overhauled, but

interestingly has been augmented by a wedge of new pipework further down the church, the whole conglomerate being controlled from a console which, to put it mildly, is futuristic. Such a contract could only be undertaken by a handful of firms worldwide, who have both the ability and the interest. This one is quite predictable – Klais of Bonn.

Equally extraordinary is the design and construction of an entirely new mechanical action Utopia Barokorgel in the style of Hildebrandt (Göteborg so far, so good!), but with the dual facility of being an ideal Bach organ whilst simultaneously able to satisfy – electrically – the most experimental concepts of twenty-first century avant-garde composition. With the digital console comes a 35-page instruction booklet which will presumably need to be memorized before it can be fully utilized. Undoubtedly yet another subject requiring pages to itself, this beautiful organ evidently does the lot. But, step outside its core, honourable, origins, and – again – you will love it or hate it. What really intrigues me is the possibility of some teenaged whizz-kid organ nut latching onto all this and working out how to play the thing from his bedroom laptop! Closing thought ... of its two faces, the mechanical Hildebrandt or the Zauberorgel, which will better stand the test of time??

David Butterworth



To have your cake and eat it – Utopia Barokorgel

Any Old Iron?

Ebay is a wonder of the internet. Anything you may want or need – from a Penny Black to a pile of old bricks - and you're likely to find it there. This ‘market-place’ first came to my attention when I discovered that the old organ from Pershore Abbey, already in store in the church opposite and taking up a lot of space, was sold to a small jobbing organ-builder for £100. What with two sixteen-foot reeds, abundant mixturework, high quality pipework, etc., etc., the purchaser must have thought all his birthdays had come at once. But tap in ‘pipe organs’ and, every now and then, you may still find something to tempt you ... How about two of these current offerings, if you have any spare cash after the January sales? Hurry, though; they may have gone by the time you read this.



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17 Watching



Please find enclosed with this edition a subscription reminder form. If you have already paid please ignore it. Otherwise please help the Society by acting now! Thank you. *Richard Eaton*

Our inveterate traveller-enthusiast, Denis, strikes once more, back from what must have been an enviable experience ...

Visit to the Netherlands in September 2019

I recently spent a week in the Netherlands on an organ playing trip with a small group of organists. Our base was a hotel opposite the railway and bus stations in Alkmaar, which was particularly convenient as all of our travelling was by bus, train and tram. Unlike here, it all worked as it was supposed to, everything was on time and the various modes of transport connected seamlessly.



The first train took us to Amsterdam, and then the tram onwards to St Augustinus' Catholic Church. This had begun life in central Amsterdam and was originally a hidden church. The Dutch had their own Reformation in 1578; for many years other faiths could practise their religion, but discreetly such that it was not obvious that their building was a church. This congregation moved at the end of the nineteenth-century to a new building to the west. However, it became unsafe after the Second World War and was in turn replaced in the 1960's, with an architecturally undistinguished building. From outside it is still not obvious it is a church, as it was rebuilt as part of a complex mainly devoted to an old people's home.

Whatever one thinks of the building, the congregation at least took their original organ with them when they moved. It was built by the French organ maker, Aristide Cavaillé-Coll and originally cost 60,000 gulden (about €400,000 today). There is currently the possibility of moving again to a nearby church; the regular congregation is down to 60 attendees, even though they have 3,000 on the roll. If this move takes place, it is planned that the organ will go with them again, giving the new destination two organs. Their Cavaillé-Coll has 2 manuals and 20 stops. It sounds well enough but would be even better in a more resonant building.

The next visit was to a place where I thought I'd died and gone to organ heaven, the Orgelpark. The building is a former Dutch Reformed Church built in 1917, which had several subsequent uses before its current incarnation. The organ forms the common thread in a varied annual programme. There are about 80 events per season, including classical music, jazz and improvised music, concerts involving other art forms such as dance and film, master classes and symposia. It is a workplace for young talent from Dutch and foreign conservatoires, and new music is commissioned and performed. In fact, there was a young Dutch composer at work during our visit.



We were met by the director, Hans Fidom, who explained how this institution had come into being. Basically, a Dutch packaging millionaire and organ enthusiast chose to put his money to good use by establishing the Utopia Foundation which provides the wherewithal to run the Orgelpark.

In this former chapel space, organs dominate. There is the original Sauer organ from 1922 (2 manuals, 31 stops); an organ installed in 2018 for Baroque music in the style of the Hildebrandt organ at Naumburg (2 manuals 33 stops); and, opposite the Sauer, an organ built by Verschueren Orgelbouw in Heythuysen in the style of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (3 manuals, 41 stops).

Opposite the Hildebrandt style organ is a replica of an instrument based on an organ built in 1479 by Peter Gerritsz for the Nicolaïkerk in Utrecht. Parts of the original organ have been preserved in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: the case, one of the wind chests, various parts, and a large number of pipes. The temperament used is hard on the ear and I would not like to listen to it for long. True to tradition the organ is hand blown, with the equipment visible at the rear of the case. Guess who became chief blower? I know my place. The paintings on the organ doors are in a traditional Dutch style.

On the floor of the building, there is a detached console on which can be played both the Sauer and the Hildebrandt-style instrument, so it is possible to change organs in a recital. It is also possible to create your own registrations electronically. For example you could select an 8' flute and add another voice starting on another degree of the scale; the software then selects the pipes to sound if you were to add a 7th to it. I suppose you could start with an 8' stop and add a whole family of them at 16', 4', 2' and 1', or any other pitch you like, should you be so inclined. As if this were not enough, the scene is completed by several more instruments, including a Belgian dance organ.



Denis Littleton (to be continued)

From School to Stool: Year Five discovers the wonder of the pipe organ

On a pleasant summer's afternoon last June, twenty five pupils from Bramcote Church of England Primary School made the short trip to St. Michael's Church for an enjoyable couple of hours of interactive introduction to "all things pipe".

It all came about as a result of discussions by our N.D.S.O committee on how we might develop initiatives to widen knowledge of, and interest in, the organ, and encourage more young people to learn the instrument. School visits seemed to be a good first step and a small working party, including myself, was tasked with implementation.

We decided at an early stage that other relevant groups must have had similar thoughts and perhaps developed a workable format that we may be able to utilise, rather than "reinventing the wheel". Sure enough, it transpired that the Derby Association had been organising such visits for a number of years and had an experienced team of presenters and excellent interactive and presentational aids that could be drawn upon.

Having contacted the coordinator of the Derby initiative, Stephen Johns, I was warmly welcomed to observe a school visit to the organ at All Saint's Mickleover. I was immediately impressed by the organisation and the interactive equipment and aids in use for the various sessions, as well as the quality of the presentations, each run on this occasion by retired teachers. What impressed me most was the interest and obvious enjoyment of all the children throughout, irrespective of any previous musical background.

One of the critical aspects to successfully encouraging school participation is, according to Stephen, making contact at an appropriate level within the school in order to generate enthusiasm within the teaching staff and to schedule a visit in an already pressured timetable.

Therefore, as a governor at our local primary school, it seemed ideal for me to organise a "pilot" session at my own church, St Michael's, Bramcote. It was obvious that it would be impractical, at least in the short term, to develop our own presentations and that it was eminently sensible to invite the Derby team to lead most of the sessions which, I'm pleased to say, they were delighted to do.

The visit commenced with the children seated in church and being brought up to the console in predetermined groups of five to observe at close quarters whilst I played a piece involving use of different manuals, pedals, stop changes, swell pedal, pistons, etc. There followed an introductory session where the various tones, pitches, types of pipe, etc., were demonstrated and explained, as well as showing individual pipes from 8,4 and 2ft ranks. Lots of questions were asked of the children with enthusiastic responses throughout.

The pupils then broke into groups of five, together with a member of school staff in each, to actively participate in five workshops of ten minutes each:

Play the organ

Each child was able to sit at the console and, under my direction, explore the various stops, manuals, swell pedal, pistons, etc., for themselves, whilst being observed by other group members. Interesting questions included “How much would it cost to replace the organ if I break it...£200?” There were gasps when I suggested that adding three noughts would be closer to the mark!



What an organ looks like

A look at various pictures of organ fronts and explanation of why all the pipes cannot generally be on display. Children were then encouraged to design their own organ fronts using a table top wooden tray and small wooden rods of various lengths as imitation pipes.

Pedal power

A portable pedal board linked to a laptop to produce digital bass notes, together with a lowered bench, gave everyone the opportunity to be “feet-on” and have fun. They were also impressed by a virtuoso video clip of “The flight of the bumblebee” played at speed on the pedals!

How an organ works

The Derby Association have a table top hand-blown mechanical organ with a one octave keyboard and 8,4,2 ft ranks. The “key to pipe” mechanism was explained and the pipe length to pitch relationship was reinforced. Everyone had the chance to blow and to play the organ.

Powerpoint presentation

A further look at some large organ fronts, consoles and various examples of different pipes, etc., to draw together messages and information from other sessions with lots of questions to the children.

Finally the groups returned to church to listen to two further pieces of contrasting style and concluding remarks. The children had obviously enjoyed themselves, as had the presenters and, in a subsequent email, the head teacher commented as follows:

“..... I think the session was brilliant – the children were able to engage through both hands-on experience and also learning from very enthusiastic and experienced organists. I would definitely be interested in developing a programme for primary children not only in our school but maybe other local schools in the area, as there are lots of opportunity for cross-curricula links in e.g. science, music and D&T.”

One of the useful aspects of the layout at Bramcote is that our church centre is attached to the church, enabling us to accommodate easily the five separate areas for the workshops in close proximity, but without the sound from each disturbing the other groups. In view of the tight timings for changeover of groups this was particularly helpful.

I plan to arrange a follow up visit for a number of the children who are learning piano or keyboard to play their favourite pieces on the organ and hopefully take their possible interest in learning the organ to the next stage. There is also a follow up pack of work papers that I have forwarded to the school for the pupils to revise what they had learned on the day.

I will certainly look to repeat the presentation at Bramcote to another group in this academic year. If you think there may be similar opportunities that you would like to explore in your area, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at david.hanford@btinternet.com or phone on 07484 293990. It really is down to all of us to share our love of the instrument as widely as possible and provide opportunities to potential young players in the same way that many of us received encouragement at an early age. Hopefully, in time, we can get more N.D.S.O. members (with enhanced DBS clearance) to become involved in such presentations; but in the meantime the Derby team are happy, in principle, to be invited “across the border” to assist where necessary

My sincere thanks must go to Stephen Johns and all the Derby team, not only for their development and presentation of some excellent material, but also their willingness to share their experiences and give their time in order to make our session such a success.

David Hanford

BOOK REVIEW

An Organ Builder Looks Back – John Budgen. ISBN 978-1-912020-61-4. Widely available.

Placed as they usually are at the rear end of journals, often lengthy and not necessarily informative, book reviews are generally low on my list of priorities. I am moved, however, to draw attention to this splendid little book by a devoted churchman, organist and organ builder – effectively an autobiography of a man first brought to my attention in the 1960s by our College chaplain; so he has certainly been around for a while. John's memoir takes us right across the gamut of his widely varied achievements, predominantly at the helm of that noble old British firm, J.C. Bishop & Sons, alive and well to this day in their equally Dickensian premises in Ipswich and Beethoven Street. John was Ipswich, while Miss Suggate and (now) Dr Maurice Merrell looked after London. John's work with them ranged right across the board, from routine tuning to new organs, but most interestingly perhaps a growing penchant for, and aptitude in, historic restoration. Framlingham was a breakthrough in 1970 – visited only shortly beforehand by myself and a carload of friends on a lazy day out when, incidentally, I recall that a mere half pint of the local brew left me feeling very much the worse for wear ... Two other restorations should also stand out in recent N.D.S.O. memory – those at St Margaret's, Lothbury during John Morehen's London Day; and the Grove organ in Tewkesbury Abbey (visited only last year), a real 'one-off' by Mitchell & Thynne with a very complex mixture of actions, and now newly demonstrated by Daniel Moult on Fugue State Films' latest release "The English Organ."

The book is neatly divided into twelve chapters, of length commensurate with John's priorities, covering amongst other matters the Bishop firm; working with Ralph Downes; and barrel organs (in which sphere he is an acknowledged master.) The chapter headed 'Electronics' takes up a mere half of one page, centralized. The very last section is devoted to a poem John wrote in 1987, and here I quote just the last two verses (you will have to buy the book to see the rest – it is hilarious):

"In the end, the confusion defeated
Their quest for an answer sublime,
So they purchased a Loud-Speaker organ,
Saving money, decisions and time.

"For the first year they thought it was marvellous,
After three 'well it wasn't the *same*',
And the present half-million appeal?
Oh well, it's just part of the game."

Our heritage owes an enormous debt of gratitude to this man. Thank you, John, and thanks for sharing.

David Butterworth

